A Few

PLAIN WORDS

Concerning

CONFORMITY

IN

Matter of *Religion* and *Worship*: And also concerning Evidence and Judgment in Cases of Conscience.

Published to all Magistrates, Jurors, and People, within the Nation of England.

SEing that the main thing now intended by the late Act of Parliament is to bring people into Conformity unto the Lyturgie of the Church of *England*, as appears by the said Act, in providing Remedies against all other Assemblies and Meetings as seditious Conventicles; Now the main Question will be this; *Whether the Lyturgie of the Church of* England *be the true Reformed Religion and Worship, according to the purity in Primitive times? And whether such as dissent from it do not remain in the Apostate?* This is the main Question now to be considered; for the Lyturgie-worship, as now practised in the *Church of England*, is generally taken to be the *best Reformed*, and nearest to the *Apostolick Order*, and so is pressed and urged as the most *Refined Religion and Worship to be observed*. Now how far it is *Reformed*, and how near it is brought unto the *Apostolick Order*, I shall not at this time compass or distinguish; but if it were truly and rightly *Reformed* into the *Primitive Purity*, and that the same *Spirit of Truth* had the ordering of it as the Apostles were ordered by, then no Persecution would rise out of it, for in the *Apostolick Order* there was never any; therefore the *Reformation* is yet a far off from that *Religion and Worship* which was in the

Primitive times, and so the dissenting from it, or not conforming to it, doth not conclude the dissenters to be in Error, because something may lie nearer the truth of the *Apostolick Worship* then what the Lyturgie of the Church of *England* is reformed into. For if such as have received the *Spirit of God*, and *therein worship him*, have found something nearer to the *Apostolick Practice*, than what is observed by the Lyturgie of the Church of *England*, then they are to be allowed the liberty in their Worship without restraint or prohibition, for the true Worship is in the Spirit, and they that worship God in the Spirit; they are truly Reformed into the *Apostolick Order*, and they cannot persecute any, but walk in love and meekness towards all, which is the clearest Evidence of the best *Reformed Religion*, and that which lies neareſt unto the *Apostolick Order*: For the word *Lyturgie* signifies, *The Publick Service of the Church*. Now if the Lyturgie of the Church of *England*, do not agree with the Lyturgie of the true Church in Primitive times, then it is not transgression to dissent from it, and there is nothing doth more infallibly demonstrate the disagreement, than Persecution by it, and suffering under it; for the Publick Service in the true Church, is by the Spirit of God, and none can order the Church in things pertaining to God but by the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God never persecuted any, nor such as worship God in the Spirit cannot be of that mind, for that is not a good service in the Church, neither do such as are guided by the Spirit of God dissent from the Lyturgie, but may be truly in the publick Service of the Church, though not in the publick Service of the Church of *England*. So then it remains to be enquired by such as yet know not what Religion and Worship is best Reformed and most agreeable to the Lyturgie, or publick Worship of the Church in Primitive times? and something may herein be said to answer any enquirer.

1. That is the best Reformed Religion and Worship, which is Reformed by the Spirit of God, because that hath power to Reform and Change the heart, and so to order the heart in the fear of God and in the publick service of the Church.

2. That is the best Reformed Religion and Worship which stands in the freedom of the Spirit, in which there is no binding or limitation, but a free Service in the Church.

3. That is the best Reformed Religion and Worship, which stands in love, peace, and good-will, in which there is no Restriction nor Persecution, but a serving one another in love, which is the publick Service of the Church.

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4. That is the best Reformed Religion and worship, when every man doth to another as he would be done unto himself, in which there is no envy, hatred, or malice, but a peaceable and a holy life in all godliness and honesty, which is the publick service of the Church.

These few things being well considered, it will appear, that the people who are called Quakers, do not dissent from the Lyturgie, but are due observers of it; for as they are guided by the Spirit of God, so their service is a publick service of the Church; but the service of the Church of *England* is a private service compared with the many Religions and Worships that are in the world: For nothing can be a publick service of the Church, but that which is performed in the publick Spirit of God; because the Spirit is an universal principle, and in every Nation it guideth such as receives it and believes in it, into one way and service, and that is publick in every Nation, and not tied or bound unto one Nation only, for that which may be observed in one Nation, is but a private thing compared with other Nations in the world, that differ from them in matter of Religion and worship: But the Spirit and power of God reforms Nations, and gathers them into unity and peace, in which they are true members of the Church, and set in the publick service of it; and if the word Lyturgie may be allowed to the Quakers, according to its proper signification, then they are in practice the best observers of it, for their service is a publick service in the *Church*.

Now let all Magistrates who are commissioned to give judgement touching offences, seriously consider, for the matter is of such weight and concernment, as worthy to be deliberated, and not hastily to fall upon it in any rash conclusion; for it is only seditious *Conventicles* which the late Act provideth Remedies against, and gives this reason; because at their Meetings they contrive Insurrections, as late experience hath shewed: Now the *Quakers* are not any way guilty of offending in these cases, and that it may be the better understood, I shall explain the signification of the words unto the Capacities of all sorts of sensible people. *Sedition* is discord, strife, and debate. *Conventicle* is a small Assembly commonly for ill things, or as the Law expounds it, where many do impart with others to kill a man, or to take anothers part in ill things, *Law*. 173. *Insurrection* is a rising of men in Arms: Now concerning all these things, which is the very ground of the said Act, there cannot any thing justly be laid to the *Quakers* charge; for if experience in these cases be taken for good evidence, then the *Quakers* Meetings are wholly cleared by the said Act, for no

 such

such things hath ever been experienced to rise from their Meetings; and therefore the said Act not lying against them in the ground, no Penalty or punishment is to be laid upon them by vertue of the same. And this is written unto you Magistrates, who are commissioned to give judgment in cases of offences; for it is a plea generally used by Magistrates, That they are bound to put the Law in Execution: well, if it be so, and that you are so careful to discharge your trust, yet you must find an offender before you can legally execute the Law, and the offence must arise by good and sound evidence to be a transgressing of that Law, and that according to the purpose of the Law: So that you may be in a capacity to judge and determine Causes equally, according to good evidence, in things pertaining to men; but as to things pertaining to Conscience, they are too high for you, for you can have no evidence to inform you concerning the offence, and so cannot judg or determine the matter equally in that case: And if in this case of Meeting, there nothing doth appear of discord or strife, or any ill things, then there is not any thing for you to take knowledg of as an offence, or that can be charged as transgression upon such as so meet, though they meet in greater or lesser numbers, for the Act is not against peaceable Meetings, nor against the true Worship of God; but where there is Religion and Worship pretended in Meetings, and some ill thing intended by that Meeting, and according to the intention break forth into a publick manifestation, then, upon good evidence, in that case you may proceed to Penalties and punishment of the offenders, and so every apparent offence may have a witness (without) to give evidence to the Fact, by which Judgment may be given according to the offence. But if the Conscience offend against God, that must be left to his witness within, and to his Judgement alone, who both sees the offence, and knows how to punish it according to the nature of it; and therefore all such cases as relate to the Conscience, is to be left to God alone, who seeth secrets, and judgeth secrets, and gives to every man according to his deeds, without respect of persons.

And now a few words unto you that serve upon Juries, seeing something in the said Act may come within your enquiry; for the third offence in order to Transportation, is to be tryed by Verdict: Now where you come to be concerned in any such case, wherein the matter lies in point of Conscience, be very careful what you do. And first, you that serve upon grand Juries, the matter lyes of very great concernment unto you, forasmuch as you are the finders and accusers

of

of offenders, and so prepares the way in order to conviction or Judgement. Now if there be not some evidence, that can make good proof that there was some appearance of discord or ill things at such a Meeting, for which any Party or Parties may stand indicted, then you are not in a capacity to find the Bill to be true, forasmuch as you cannot be informed whether such a Meeting was pretended to Worship, and some ill thing intended by it, or whether it was a Meeting to worship God singly in Spirit and in Truth, which the Act is not against, and so it lye as a case of Conscience, without any appearance to you can have no true evidence in it, and therefore you are not to find it, nor acquit any in that case as guilty of an offence worthy of punishment.

Object. *But some may say, We only enquire for the King, and therefore upon good evidence to the Indictment, we are bound to find it, and let the Party clear himself upon his Tryal.*

Answ. As you stand only to enquire for the King, so you are to enquire what wrong the King sustains by the Fact, of which the Party stands indicted for: if the evidence to the Indictment prove no same wrong done to the King in matter of Fact, then you cannot know the Bill to be a true Bill, and so is not to put the Party upon his Tryal: for if the Indictment do not lye, as to some wrong done by the Party indicted, either as to Life, Estate, Peace, or Liberty of another, and that it be not so proved by your evidence, then the King is not wronged, and you may clearly acquit the Party on the Kings behalf, and leave things that pertain to the Conscience unto God alone, for none besides him knows what is in man. And you that are ordered upon Juries for Conviction, your place is of the greatest weight and concernment, forasmuch as you try the Life, and may either save it, or destroy it: For though the grand Jury do enquire and find the Indictment, yet it is you that either Condemn a man upon his Tryal, for you are Judges of the Fact, and if you judge the Party guilty of the Fact, then you expose him to the Judgement of the Law, in that Case. Now forasmuch as there is a Law of Parliament made, which doth refer the Tryal of the third offence punishable by it, unto a Verdict, if it so come to pass, that any such Tryal be brought before you, consider well what evidence you have to prove it, for there lyes the main thing on your Part, what according to your evidence doth either find the Party guilty, or clear concerning the Fact, and if you find him clear as to the Fact, then you free him unto the Sentence of the Law. Now it may be in such Cases, you may have some Evidence that will prove a Meeting above the number of five besides the Family, but then consider whether such Evidence be sufficient to prove any such

ders against the said Act, except it be also proved, that there was discord and strife, or any ill things practised in such a Meeting, which is the very signification of the words upon which the said Act is grounded; now if no such thing can be proved unto you, then there is not any Meeting that doth amount to transgression against the said Act, though there be a Meeting to the number of five hundred or more, for it is the thing done that makes the Fact; but if no such thing as before mentioned be done in the Assemblies of people in the way wherein they worship, then the Act is not transgressed, and if not transgressed, then such as meets together are not to be punished as offendors: therefore consider well your places, for your service stands in judging the Fact according to your Evidence, but wherein any case of Conscience is brought before you, there can no Evidence prove the matter truly to you, and therefore you are to leave it unto God, and to his Witness in the Conscience, and by your Verdict to acquit all People in things relating to their Conscience, and let them account unto God before whom they must stand or fall.

And now a few words unto all People, for seeing there is information and evidence to be given in the aforesaid cases, before there can be any proceedings as to Conviction or Judgment, it doth concern every one to be careful what they do, for the Act doth not impose any penalty or punishment upon any for not informing, and therefore where any do set themselves to do it, they will but manifest a forward mind in the thing wherein they may keep themselves free, and if any do put themselves upon it, as to Inform against any peaceable meeting of the people called Quakers, they will manifest more envy and malice to their neighbours than love and good will: For the Act is not against the Quakers Meetings, being their Meetings are peacable, and no peacable Meeting is a seditious Conventicle, and how can any truly Inform of unlawful Meeting, when the Law is not against it, for that makes a thing unlawful when the thing done is against the Law in that case, but the Quakers Meetings are not against the Act in that case made, for it is made to prevent and suppress seditious Conventicles, and pretenders of Worship, and not peaceable Meetings, and be true Worship. And so to meet peaceable, as the Quakers do, and all along have done on their parts, above the number of 5 besides the Family, is not an unlawful Assembly or Meeting, for the Law is not against it, but to meet to the number of five besides the Family, under Pretence of Religion and Worship, and at such Meetings to enter into discord and strife, and do ill things, as to rise in Armes, and be tumultuous to the disturbance of the Nations peace, then is it a Seditious Conventicle, and an unlawful Meeting, because the Law

is against it, and they that meet in that manner, are also hazard of the penalties and punishments that the Law in that case provideth against offenders, and it is only such as are dangerous Seducers, who at their Meetings contrive insurrection, or to raise up strife, and all things which makes a Seditious Conventicle, as is before explained: Therefore let all people be careful how they inform and give evidence in this case, for the Act doth not prohibit any peaceable Meeting, where people meet together in the fear of God, and truly worship him in tenderness of Conscience, this is not only a pretended thing, but a real true thing, which the Act doth not prohibit. Therefore all people be in love with your Neighbours, and then no hasty Information or evidence will be given against any for their obedience unto God, and for worshipping him in Spirit and in Truth, according as his mind, but if there be no Informers, there can be no proceedings, and therefore no information is the cause that gives motion to the Wheel, so there ought to be great care and tenderness in it because one Neighbour may thereby expose another unto great sufferings, and where any do so they do not love their Neighbors as themselves, which is a sure mark of the true Religion: And now if any should have it in their minds to inform and give Evidence in the case aforesaid, I ask you, what you will inform touching the Quakers Meetings, will you Inform that there was a Meeting of five besides the Family; and will you say that you will give Evidence of it, you shall not need for we confesse it; but will you inform that there was strife and discord amongst them, or any ill thing in action, or any appearance of rising in arms, and so a Seditious Conventicle, according to the Act: if you say nay, we cannot give such Information as the truth, nor we dare not give Evidence to any such thing, it may be that some may be thus honest, and it may be some again that will not fear to inform, and evidence the matter by the Act intended, though they neither see nor know that so it is amongst such against whom they Inform; and therefore unto the first, that honestly confesseth the truth, there needs not any thing be said, being their own confession clears us; but unto such as willfully and obstinately resolve to do us harm, if it be in their power, unto such we say, that your Information and Evidence is not to be regarded by sober Magistrates or Jurors, for our practice is so generally known, that it will be apparently manifest to be envy and malice, where any such Information of Evidence is given against us.

And further, consider this one thing more in general, which I shall offer to you by way of question: Was not the Christian Religion and Worship in primitive times a true Religion and Worship? and was there not both

both *Jewes* and *Gentiles* gathered in it? and was there not many *Jewes* and *Gentiles* that differed from them in Religion and Worship? and did the true Christians endeavour to force the Dissenters by an outward Law to joyn with them? You do not read in all the Scripture, that the true Christians did ever practice any such thing, either to inform or punish any in matter of Conscience. Therefore let not this Nation of *England* give occasion unto other Nations, to upbraid them with persecution, for it will be much to the dishonour of it, if not to the ruine of it, by the hand of the Lord. Oh surely it cannot but touch many tender hearts who are observers of the Lyturgie of the Church of *England*, to see such persecution rise out of it, and that against an innocent people; for we that are called *Quakers* are a people well known in our Countries, and the Witness of God doth bear a sure testimony for us, however men may witness against us, or however they may accuse, judge and condemn us, yet doth the Witness of God clear us from the guilt of any Just offence against the present power, and the Peace thereof; and whatsoever may come to pass concerning us in this matter, yet there is no Law against us, and being no Law, there is no transgression, and so no Fact worthy of condemnation. Much might be said in these things, but I shall leave all with the Lord, and to his just and righteous Witness in every conscience which will plead with all for us, when Tongues and Pens are still and silent, and let not any think it strange that I have used such plainnesse of speech in this matter, for it is in the behalf of *Gods* precious Truth, and all that live in it. And being that our liberty, Estates, and lives are herein concerned, the plainnesse of my speech may well be allowed, considering also, that it is no lesse than true love to all your souls who are or may be any way concerned in this matter; for we that are called *Quakers* do truly love the *Lamb*, and follow him, and the Lamb and the saints must have the Victory, and in the Lambs Love, Meekness, and Patience we have Rest and Peace.

Written the 27. of the 4 Moneth, 1664.

W. S.

THE END.